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ABSTRACT

A policy statement adopted by the membership of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities at its 1979 annual meeting is presented. Policy guidelines for states based upon the expectations that citizens have of public institutions and the concomitant responsibilities that state governments have to institutions are summarized. The following topics are addressed: state commitment to low-cost, quality public higher education; planning, accountability, and institutional integrity; state regulation and oversight of higher education; public funds for private and proprietary institutions; state reappropriation of federal funds; and academic public service. A list of association members by state is included. (SW)

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# Public Higher Education and the States

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## Introduction

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities strongly believes that the state's first priority should be to insure the quality of public higher education. This does not negate the importance of pluralism in higher education. It does recognize the fact that nationally some 80 percent of college students attend public institutions; and that the taxpayers have expectations for public higher education. In general, they expect:

- equality of opportunity for students from all walks of life, regardless of their income;
- ready access to a college or university;
- quality educational programs, regardless of the degree being pursued;
- the application of the college or university's resources and knowledge to problems in the community.

State colleges and universities have a responsibility to meet these expectations because they are public institutions. In turn, the states have a responsibility to the institutions to see that expectations are fulfilled:

- to provide adequate support that will insure low-cost access and quality programs;
- to equitably distribute state, and federal, funds to further a diverse public higher education system;
- to give higher education a strong voice in educational planning;
- to guard against unreasonable regulation and intrusion that will damage the good faith partnership that must exist between the state and its institutions if future programs are to be planned and executed in the most cost-effective manner.

## State Commitment to Low-Cost, Quality Public Higher Education

AASCU believes that every person in America is entitled to a postsecondary education that fits the individual's needs and qualifications. Lack of funds should never be an insurmountable barrier to educational opportunity.

During the past 200 years, state-supported public education has been a major contributor to the overall development of American society. The availability of low or no tuition colleges and universities vastly accelerated the economic, cultural, and social progress of the states. The unique lifestyle that is American could not have been achieved without the broad-base of an educated population.

Today, the availability of low tuition and fee colleges and universities is equally important—perhaps even more so—to the continued development of America and its people. Strong state support to assure low tuition and fees offers a more certain long-term guarantee of educational opportunity for people from all income levels than do various student aid programs. Student aid can not provide enough assistance to a broad range of students to compensate for continually escalating tuition and fees. Nor should low- and moderate-income students be put in the position of having to take out long-term, high interest loans in order to gain an education at a state college or university.

This last point is very important. Every state policymaker should view long-term, high interest "student loan bank" or "tuition advance fund" proposals with great caution. If these proposals are paired with a plan to force public higher education tuition and fees much higher, many more students would have to rely on expensive loans. Two results would be certain. Many students would choose not to attend college and the state's educated populace would decrease; those who did assume the loans would graduate with debts that would affect their lives for years, reducing their ability to expand the state's economy.

AASCU strongly supports federal and state financial aid for both full- and part-time college students, but it must be considered as a supplement to, not a substitute for, low tuition and fees.

State political leaders still must recognize that the continued progress of the states and the nation depends on a growing pool of well-educated and

productive men and women. That progress depends upon a commitment by the states to maintain adequate levels of support to assure quality in the faculties, facilities, and thus the students of state colleges and universities.

## Planning, Accountability and Institutional Integrity

AASCU members recognize the fact that, as public institutions, they are accountable to the states' taxpayers and their elected representatives. Accountability is not only a function of the past and present, but extends into the future through sound planning.

In seeking accountability and planning for an uncertain future, the states should not rush to increase the regulation of their institutions. American higher education has thrived on the principle of decentralized decision-making about curriculum, instructional methods, and relationships between students and their teachers. AASCU members agree with the Education Commission of the States (ECS) that planning for the future should recognize the desirability of decentralization of educational decision-making.

The development of procedures for planning and accountability should involve institutional leaders as well as state and system officials. It should be more of a participatory process than a regulatory or control process. The needs of the future will require a continuing reassessment of institutional offerings and the means by which those offerings are made available to a broader range of full- and part-time students.

Planning for the future requires altering enrollment-driven funding formulas to provide support for the changing roles of state colleges and universities and to accommodate the unique and distinctive roles and circumstances of institutions. Enrollment-driven formulas, developed for a period of enrollment growth, are not adequate to maintain the quality of higher education in a period of increasing costs and changing enrollment patterns. Such changes demand more flexible budget funding to meet new operational demands.

## State Regulation and Oversight of Higher Education

It has long been the tradition in American legal and political practices that higher education remain

free of political interference. There is a growing fear of increasing intrusion into public higher education beyond appropriate accountability for the use of public funds.

With the growth of state government has come increased regulation and oversight by legislators, state budget officers, purchasing agents, legislative auditors, and other state officials; each group with its own perspectives, each with its own forms, and each with its own conclusions. These techniques often result in new state regulations and mandates which, in effect, impose policy changes.

Further encroachment erodes the independent authority for educational and research decisions which has been the strength of American higher education since its inception.

Such encroachment encourages political and governmental intrusion into the heart of the academic enterprise by increasing the potential for outside decisions affecting faculty appointments, curriculum, research, and publications. This level of "oversight" is accomplished at great expense for which institutions are not reimbursed.

It is understood that education officials have inescapable responsibilities for accountability. However, to fulfill its role in society, higher education must be able to function free of political interference.

## Public Funds for Private and Proprietary Institutions

Today, over 40 states provide some form of aid to the private sector. State student aid (sometimes limited to "independent" colleges) is most common, but an increasing number of states also allot institutional aid on a per student or per degree-awarded basis. Some states now have "tuition offset" or "tuition equalization" programs that are intended to reduce tuition to make it possible for more students to attend private colleges, and some also include proprietary school students in their state student aid programs.

AASCU members strongly support pluralism in American higher education. However, no state aid to the private or proprietary sector should be at the expense of public college students, either in terms of reduced appropriations for the public sector or increased tuition and student charges at the state colleges and universities. Further, any

college or university receiving and dispersing funds from the state should be subject to the same fiscal and program accountability required of state-supported institutions.

### State Reappropriation of Federal Funds

AASCU opposes the move toward state legislative reappropriation of federal funds to educational institutions, including student aid and research grants. This practice could affect the plans of thousands of students in each state by making it difficult for them to know in time whether they will receive federal student financial aid.

State reappropriation also can prevent public colleges and universities from receiving research grants and other funds which enable them to carry out essential national priorities, improve their own program quality, and better serve the people of their states.

The U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, in its model state reappropriation legislation, suggests that higher education is the one state-supported service that could be omitted from legislative reappropriation of federal funds.

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), based on the report from its Fiscal Affairs and Oversight Committee, recommends exempting individual transfer payments to recipients and research grants to individuals and institutions of higher education from "formal and specific legislative oversight."

AASCU urges state legislative leaders to adopt the NCSL recommendations with the understanding that appropriate accountability procedures can and should be followed in each state.

### Academic Public Service

State policy-makers should become more aware of the invaluable public service functions which state colleges and universities can and do provide for their states, regions, and communities. State colleges and universities provide knowledge resources that are useful in assisting state and local decision-makers to find solutions to complex and often unusual problems through applied research, technical assistance, direct consultation, informational services, and intern programs.

Public service, as one of the three vital functions of public colleges and universities (along with teaching and research) is nevertheless undervalued by many state budget-makers. While teaching and research are major considerations in the appropriations for state colleges and universities, seldom is there a specific appropriation made to support the public service functions of the institutions. More often services are expected to occur as part of an institution's ongoing functions, supported out of its normal budget. This attitude hampers the ability of state colleges and universities to fulfill the full potential of their public service role.

State officials should recognize the benefits that accrue to government, industry, labor and social organizations from academic public service. They should reassess the funding for academic public service in light of the cost-effective benefits that result, and of the state's increasing need for public service to meet future demands.

State colleges and universities welcome the challenges of the future. With the help and cooperation of the public and public officials, they can continue to assure progress in the future as they have in the past. The people of the states have a right to expect that, and we are determined to do our part in meeting the expectations.

*Adopted by the AASCU membership at its 19th annual meeting, November 1979.*

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Pittsburg State University
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Northeastern Oklahoma State University
Northwestern Oklahoma State University
Oklahoma Panhandle State University
Southeastern Oklahoma State University
Southwestern Oklahoma State University
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Southern Oregon State College

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Slippery Rock State College
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RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island College

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Coastal Carolina College of the University of South Carolina
The College of Charleston
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Lander College
University of South Carolina at Aiken
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SOUTH DAKOTA

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Dakota State College
Northern State College
South Dakota School of Mines and Technology
University of South Dakota at Springfield

TENNESSEE

Austin Peay State University
East Tennessee State University
Memphis State University
Middle Tennessee State University
Tennessee Technological University
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
University of Tennessee at Martin

TEXAS

Angelo State University
Corpus Christi State University
East Texas State University
East Texas State University at Texarkana
Lamar University
Laredo State University
Midwestern State University
North Texas State University
Sam Houston State University
Southwest Texas State University
Stephen F. Austin State University
Sul Ross State University
Texas A & M University at Galveston
Texas A & I University
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Texas Tech University
Texas Woman's University
University of Houston at Clear Lake City
University of Houston, Victoria Campus
University of Texas at Dallas
University of Texas at San Antonio
University of Texas of the Permian Basin
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UTAH

Southern Utah State College
Weber State College

VERMONT

Castleton State College
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College of the Virgin Islands

VIRGINIA

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Clinch Valley College
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University of Wisconsin–Superior
University of Wisconsin–Whitewater

AASCU is an organization of 335 state colleges and universities located throughout the United States and in Guam and the Virgin Islands. Two-thirds of the institutions have graduate programs; many have doctoral programs; and a growing number also offer opportunities at the less-than-baccalaureate level. The institutions enroll approximately two and one-half million students, or about one-fourth of the total national college student population, and almost one-third of the students who are in four-year institutions. AASCU institutions have a strong commitment to provide low-cost, high quality undergraduate education which combines the values of the liberal arts with the skills and knowledge of professional and applied career-oriented programs.

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Allan W. Ostar
President

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